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VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADEIN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 69, 71 77, 84, 86, 87, 89, 91, 93, 96, 98, 102, 124 and 125 have been canceled.

The claims have been amended as follows:

70. (Twice Amended) A gene expression system comprising:

- (a) an IF gene of a lactic acid bacterium;
- (b) a SakK gene of a lactic acid bacterium;
- (c) a SakR gene of a lactic acid bacterium;
- (d) a cloned polynucleotide of interest linked to a first inducible promoter,

wherein in said gene expression system, the expression product of the IF gene activates the expression product of the SakK gene, and

the activated expression product of the SakK gene activates the expression product of the SakR gene and

the activated expression product of the SakR gene induces the first inducible promoter of the gene of interest,

thereby causing expression of the gene of interest;
wherein said the expression product of said IF gene is not a lantibiotic; and

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wherein the IF gene is expressed from a promoter different from the promoter from which the SakK gene and/or the SakR gene are expressed; and

wherein the first inducible promoter comprises two repeated nucleotide sequences 5 to 10 nucleotides long and spaced 17 to 23 nucleotides apart, wherein the downstream member of said repeated sequence is located 30 to 38 nucleotides upstream from a -10 region of a bacterial gene, and wherein said repeated nucleotide sequences are selected from the group consisting of residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:6, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:7, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:8, residues 7-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:9, and residues 7-8, 10-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:10.

73. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 70 [69], wherein the SakK gene[, or functional analog thereof,] and the SakR gene[, or functional analog thereof,] are operably linked to a constitutive promoter.

74. The gene expression system of claim 73, wherein the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and the SakK gene[, or functional analog thereof,] and the SakR gene[, or functional analog thereof] are operably

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linked to a constitutive promoter located on a second vector separate from the first vector.

75. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 70 [69], wherein the SakK gene[, or functional analog thereof,] and the SakR gene[, or functional analog thereof,] are operably linked to a second inducible promoter.

76. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 75, wherein the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and the SakK gene[, or functional analog thereof,] and the SakR gene[, or functional analog thereof,] are operably linked to a second inducible promoter located on a second vector.

78. (Amended) A host cell comprising the gene expression system of claim [claims 69 or] 70.

92. (Amended) The kit of claim 90, further comprising c) a peptide comprising the amino acid sequence of residues 19-37 of SEQ ID NO:3[, or an analog thereof that can activate the expression product of a SakK gene or a functional analog of a SakK gene].

94. (Amended) A gene expression system comprising:

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- (a) an IF peptide[, or a functional analogue thereof];
- (b) a SakK gene[, or a functional analogue thereof];
- (c) a SakR gene[, or a functional analogue thereof];
- (d) a cloned polynucleotide of interest linked to a first inducible promoter[.];

wherein in said gene expression system, the IF peptide, or functional analogue thereof activates the expression product of the SakK gene, or functional analogue thereof, and

the activated expression product of the SakK gene, or functional analogue thereof, activates the expression product of the SakR gene, or functional analogue thereof, and

the activated expression product of the SakR gene, or functional analogue thereof, induces the first promoter of the gene of interest;

thereby causing expression of the gene of interest;

wherein the first inducible promoter is a promoter different from the promoter from which the SakK gene or functional analogue thereof and/or the SakR gene or functional analogue thereof are expressed.

95. (Amended) A gene expression system comprising:

- (a) an IF peptide;
- (b) a SakK gene;
- (c) a SakR gene;

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(d) a cloned polynucleotide of interest linked to a first inducible promoter,

wherein in said gene expression system, the the IF peptide activates the expression product of the SakK gene, and

the activated expression product of the SakK gene activates the expression product of the SakR gene and

the activated expression product of the SakR gene induces the first promoter of the gene of interest,

thereby causing expression of the gene of interest;

wherein the first inducible promoter is a promoter different from the promoter from which the SakK gene [or functional analogue thereof] and/or the SakR gene [or functional analogue thereof] are expressed.

99. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 95, wherein the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and the SakK gene[, or functional analog thereof,] and the SakR gene[, or functional analog thereof] are operably linked to a constitutive promoter located on a second vector separate from the first vector.

100. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 95 [94], wherein the SakK gene[, or functional analog thereof,] and the

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SakR gene[, or functional analog thereof,] are operably linked to a second inducible promoter.

101. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 95 [94], wherein the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and SakK gene[, or functional analog thereof,] and the SakR gene[, or functional analog thereof,] are operably linked to a second inducible promoter located on a second vector.

103. (Amended) A host cell comprising parts b), c) and d) of the gene expression system of claim [claims 94 or] 95.

106. (Amended) A method for producing a polypeptide or protein of interest comprising culturing a host cell comprising the gene expression system of claim 103 in a medium, adding an IF peptide[, or functional analog thereof,] to the culture, thereby inducing expression of the gene of interest to produce the polypeptide or protein of interest; and

purifying the protein of interest from the culture.

107. (Twice Amended) An isolated nucleic acid comprising:
two repeated nucleotide sequences 5 to 10 nucleotides long
and spaced 17 to 23 nucleotides apart, wherein the downstream

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member of said repeated sequence is located 30 to 38 nucleotides upstream from a

-10 region of a bacterial gene,

wherein transcription of a coding nucleic acid sequence operatively linked to said isolated nucleic acid is activated by an expression product of a SakR gene of a lactic acid bacterium [or functional analog thereof] that has been activated by an expression product of a SakK gene of a lactic acid bacterium [or functional analog thereof,] wherein said repeated nucleotide sequences are selected from the group consisting of residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:6, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:7, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:8, residues 7-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:9, residues 7-8, 10-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:10.

112. (Amended) A gene expression system comprising the vector of claim 109 and further comprising a polynucleotide encoding an IF peptide of a *Lactobacillus* species, a polynucleotide encoding a SakK protein of a *Lactobacillus* species and a polynucleotide [polynucleotide] encoding a SakR protein of a *Lactobacillus* species.

Claims 126-134 have been added.

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Please add the following new claims:

--126. (New) The gene expression system of claim 70, in which the SakK gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

127. (New) The gene expression system of claim 70, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

128. (New) The gene expression system of claim 126, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

129. (New) The isolated nucleic acid of claim 107, wherein the SakK gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

130. (New) The gene expression system of claim 107, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

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131. (New) The gene expression system of claim 130, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

132. (New) The gene expression system of claim 112, wherein the SakK gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

133. (New) The gene expression system of claim 112, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.

134. (New) The gene expression system of claim 133, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues ____ to ____ of SEQ ID NO: 13.--